



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

REVIEWS.

The Theory of the Leisure Class. An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions. By THORSTEIN VEBLEN. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1899. Pp. viii + 400, 8vo.

A LATE critic of a book has the same advantage as the critic of an old painting. He need not have any ideas of his own. He has learned what the proper thing to say is, and he has nothing to do but to say it. In the present case the proper thing to do is to condemn the book and call it pessimistic, even "cynical." Pessimism now means: looking facts in the face; seeing things as they are; calling a spade a spade. Anyone who does this is deserving of censure as disturbing the order of things. If there is one thing that the world does not want, it is truth. Truth is a medicine that must be administered in sugar-coated pills. A very little of it reacts upon the public system and will not go down. This is no modern fact. It has always been so. It is what they used to burn folks for. Nowadays they merely put their books on a sort of moral *index librorum expurgandorum*.

The trouble with this book is that it contains too much truth. It also suggests a great deal of truth that it does not contain, and this is quite as bad as to tell the truth outright. Galileo and Servetus were not persecuted for what they said, but for the deductions that their persecutors made from what they said. The reviewers of this book base their criticisms almost entirely on the conclusions they themselves draw from what is said in it, and scarcely at all on what it actually says. They forget entirely that it is, as its secondary title states, "an economic study in the evolution of institutions," and they assume in all gratuity that it is an attack on existing institutions. That is a pure deduction, but one for which there is no warrant in the book. Someone has said that the law of gravitation would be attacked if it was suspected of jeopardizing human interests. The history of man is exactly paralleled in the history of plants and animals, but no one has inveighed against the facts of biology, because they concern sub-human creatures. Darwin was soundly belabored for supposed consequences to man of his facts, but only for such.

Now, no truth has come more clearly forth from the most thorough study of organic evolution than that its whole method is essentially wasteful. Darwin showed this; Huxley multiplied examples of it; and even Herbert Spencer, who would have man imitate nature in all things, has supplied some of the most striking examples of the prodigality of nature. In describing this prodigality naturalists have not been suspected of condemning the habits and instincts of the birds and animals, of the fishes of the sea and the infusorians of the pool. But when an economist of a strictly scientific habit of mind investigates the history of the human species, discovers that human evolution, like organic evolution, is the outcome of the rhythmic action of great cosmic forces, one set of which is centrifugal and destructive, and tells us how these wasteful processes go on in society in coöperation with the conservative ones, he arouses hostility and is regarded as dangerous. And all because the specimens he has to investigate are men. In fact, the book is a mirror in which we can all see ourselves. It is more. It is a telescope through which we can see our ancestors, and when, all at one view, we see all the generations of our pedigree down to and including ourselves, we perceive how little difference there is, and the image takes on a rather ugly aspect. That is why it offends. This tracing back institutions, customs, habits, ideas, beliefs, and feelings to their primitive sources in barbarism and savagery, and showing what is the real basis of them, is not pleasant occupation for people who are proud of their ancestors, for many such have nothing but ancestors to be proud of.

It is perfectly legitimate to endeavor to show that the facts are not as stated, but a critic who does this must proceed scientifically. He must not waste his efforts in showing that there are other facts that have an opposite tendency. He must remember what the author of the book has set himself as a task; and in this case it must be admitted that he has clung tenaciously to this one field, resisting the temptation, which, as anyone can see, must have been strong, to go out of that field and deal with the opposite class of facts. There is no doubt that he could write as strong and able a book on the "instinct of workmanship" as he has written on the "instinct of sportsmanship," and it is to be hoped that he may do so. But in dealing with this book the critic has no right to complain that it is not a book on some other subject than the one chosen. As a matter of fact, there is much gained in dealing with one aspect of human evolution at a time. Very few writers are able to keep the different factors distinct. It requires a clear head.

Nearly all the treatment we find of such highly complex subjects is viti-ated by the perpetual mixing up of the fields of inquiry, until all is muddle and *Wirrwarr*. Here for once we have a single subject clearly handled and consistently adhered to, at the risk even of giving offense to those whose suggestibility is so strong that they cannot keep other subjects out of view.

It may be said that the author ought at least to have shown how this very leisure class, and solely by virtue of its leisure, has made the greater part certainly of the earlier scientific discoveries, and worked out some of the most important problems; that even modern science owes as much to this class as to all other classes combined, as shown by de Candolle in his *Histoire des Sciences et des Savants*; that all the important "institutions," including the learned professions and the sciences, have, as Spencer has shown, developed out of "ecclesiastical institutions," and owe their existence and advanced modern character to that typical "leisure class," the priesthood, given over to "vicarious leisure" and "devout observances;" that no class and no human being, as the labor reformers so justly insist, can do any high intellectual work, or even cultivate the mind, without a certain amount of leisure and respite from incessant toil. Our author might, it would seem to some, have at least dwelt upon these well-known and universally admitted facts relating directly to the leisure class. But, in the first place, he is not engaged in explaining the intellectual and moral progress of the world, and, in the second place, these facts are too well known to need restatement, and he seems to have no taste for hackneyed topics. Such facts are not opposed to anything he says, but are simply also true. They are patent, while what he tells us is latent, and he chose between the two classes of subjects, telling us a good many things that we did not know before instead of telling us so much that we did know. In the third place, and principally, his point of view is strictly economic, and he deals with a subject within his own specialty, and has not seen fit to branch out into wider fields, as economic writers are so much in the habit of doing. *Ne sutor ultra crepidam*.

In a word, our author is dealing with the question of wealth, and his whole treatise is confined to the "pecuniary" aspect. He finds that everything has a pecuniary value, which has little to do with its intrinsic or rational value; that this pecuniary value has grown out of a long series of events in human history leading back to the age of barbarism. It is a typical case of conventional ideas as distinguished from rational ideas. It can only be made to seem rational when we

know and can trace its history, and see how, under all the circumstances, it could not have been otherwise. Pecuniary value is the result of natural causation, like everything else, but the series of terms consists of a long winding labyrinth of causes and effects that have ultimately produced something which, looked at directly, appears irrational and absurd. In this it is no exception to the general law of survivals in ethnology. Every lawyer knows what a legal fiction is, but most of them are mistaken in imagining that only advanced races are capable of creating such fictions. The study of ethnology shows that early institutions are a mass of fictions. The savage is more logical than the civilized man. Analyze the *couvade*, considered as the fiction by which the matriarchal was transformed into the patriarchal system without a break in the chain of logic.

Pecuniary value, as distinguished from intrinsic value, is a survival, and it has probably never before been so well traced out. Here are a few of the steps, but the book must be read to see them all and how they are connected: As soon as property became recognized as the thing that chiefly insures the satisfaction of desire, the "law of acquisition" went into effect, and thenceforth the problem was how to *acquire* the most with the least effort—not how to *produce* the most. The "least effort" part of the formula lies at the foundation of the author's distinction between "industry and exploit." Exploit is comparatively easy. Industry becomes synonymous with drudgery. The love of activity, *i. e.*, the actual pleasure in the exercise of the faculties, which is the essence of the "instinct of workmanship," could scarcely be eliminated, and "leisure" is by no means incompatible with activity. But excessive activity—the prolonged and laborious exertion required for the constant re-production of the objects of consumption—is essentially irksome and has always been avoided when possible. But these objects must be produced in order that their consumption may be enjoyed, and the only way to possess them without producing them is to make others produce them. Any power to do this is immediately exercised, and as things have been constituted in the history of mankind, this has taken the form of creating a dependent industrial class and an independent leisure class. The simplest form of this was slavery, and, as the author shows, the first slaves were women; afterward captives were made slaves; and finally all were enslaved but the few having privilege and power. Extensive modification of this normal state, of course, took place with time.

Now, the most natural thing in the world is that these two sets of persons should form two great classes totally unlike in almost every

respect. The dependent class is low, debased, degraded. The independent class is high, noble, exalted. This is not merely the judgment of the higher class, but also that of the lower. It is the universally recognized relation and constitutes what is called the *régime of status*. All the occupations of the dependent class are, in our author's happy phrase, "humilific," and all the occupations in which the independent class can engage must be "honorific." These occupations must not cross each other. They must be wholly different. The humilific occupations are all industrial, productive. Therefore the leisure class must pursue no industrial or productive occupations under pain of being suspected of dependence. The humilific occupations are the only ones that are "useful" in the economic sense. Therefore no member of the leisure class may do anything useful. The leisure class derive pleasure from the exercise of their faculties, but such exercise must involve no "utility," and must be characterized by "futility." There are certain directions in which the pleasures of activity may be indulged without the suspicion of dependence or necessity. Among these purely futile occupations we find war, the chase, gaming, politics, ruling, religious observances, etc. Then there are many incidental ways in which the leisure class, when in full power, are able to enjoy themselves. Thus it is said that a common amusement of the Roman nobles was to knock down a plebeian and then hand over a sesterce, which was the amount of the fine fixed by law for such offenses; and the idea of "fun" that the young British gentry entertained in the sixteenth century was to disfigure the faces of the poor they met in the streets by means of a sharp-pointed cane that they carried for such purposes. Everything done must be in the nature of sport, nothing must have the character of work. The surplus energy must express itself in wholly non-industrial and absolutely parasitic ways, otherwise there is loss of caste.

The above may give some idea of the general nature of the fundamental antithesis that sprang up naturally, as shown, and has persisted even down to our own times. The distinction has been characterized as "invidious," and this word has been criticised as imputing blameworthy motives. But it is used in a literal sense, as that which has *envy* at its root, for not only does the industrial class envy the leisure class, but every member of the leisure class is perpetually striving to gain the envy of others of that class. Though all the members of the leisure class are exempt from drudgery, they are by no means all equal in their "ability to pay," and, as there is no limit to the possibility of

conspicuous futile consumption, no one ever has as much as he wants in order to outdo and eclipse his rivals. There is thus brought about, not only a hierarchy of wealth, but a perpetual scramble to excel one another. Wealth becomes the basis of esteem. The standard is wholly pecuniary. Not only must wealth be possessed, but there must be a show of its possession. It must be made obvious to all that there is an inexhaustible reserve. Hence leisure must be made conspicuous by "conspicuous consumption" and "conspicuous waste." If only enough persons and the right persons could see it and know it, it would be highly honorific to light a cigar occasionally with a thousand-dollar bill. A man must not limit his consumption to himself and his family. He must live in a palace many times larger than he can possibly fill, and have a large retinue of servants and retainers, ostensibly to minister to his wants, but really to make clear his ability to pay.

From this arises the important principle of "vicarious leisure" and "vicarious consumption." Most of these servants must also be exempt from any productive work, and the women of his household must be absolutely non-productive and inactive. In the modern system of semi-industrial and quasi-predatory exploitation by the bourgeoisie the "captain of industry" must manage his business, and therefore seem to be doing something, mayhap something useful, but appearances must be kept up as in the feudal manor, and upon his wife devolves the "performance of leisure" and the display of her husband's ability to pay for useless things. He confers on her a vicarious leisure, and in dress and social appointments she is able to show his ability to consume and to waste to any required extent.

It will be seen that it is throughout the application of the fundamental maxim of "political economy"—the greatest gain for the least effort. But as effort is itself agreeable, the effort meant is only industrial, productive, useful effort. Primarily war and the chase were the principal honorific employments, growing out of the antecedent state in which both were more or less productive. War for booty gave way to war for captives, *i. e.*, slaves to do the productive work, and ultimately the chase entirely lost its productive value and was indulged in merely for sport. Witness the contempt in our day for the poacher and the "pot-hunter." At first all exploit was predatory; it has now become what our author aptly calls "quasi-predatory." There is no more regard for real justice or right now than then, but the exploitation must conform to laws made by the exploiting class, and so have a show of justice. The purpose is to acquire at all hazards, but it is not enough

to say that this must be done irrespective of whether anything is produced or not. All acquisition must be non-productive under pain of falling out of the leisure class.

No biologist can fail to observe parallels in the organic world to many of the facts set forth in this book. Space forbids their enumeration, but one can scarcely refrain from noting among nature's many wasteful ways the phenomena of secondary sexual characters, typified by the antlers of the stag and the gaudy tail of the peacock. These may be compared to wasteful human fashions, such as are enumerated in the chapter on "Pecuniary Canons of Taste." The principal difference is that nature, in producing these useless and cumbersome organs, has really given them a high degree of intrinsic beauty, even as judged by human tastes, while the products of human fashion, based on the canon of "pecuniary beauty," or costliness, are useless impediments to activity without the slightest claim upon any rational standard of taste.

The author's theory of why fashions change is ingenious, and must be largely true. The ugliness caused by their superfluous cost renders them intolerable to behold for any great length of time, so that a change is demanded by the æsthetic sense even of the leisure class; but the new ones can be no better, because they, too, must have these marks of "reputable futility" and "conspicuous waste," that are necessarily offensive to taste, which is based on the instinct of workmanship. They must therefore also soon give way to others no better than they, and so on indefinitely. It is a perpetual conflict between pecuniary beauty and rational beauty, which are incompatible, but in which the former always prevails, and all the latter can do is to condemn the product and compel the victor to bring on another.

The genesis of a great number of institutions, customs, practices, and beliefs is worked out in the book, and their barbaric origin clearly shown. It would be useless to attempt their enumeration here, and only a few of the most curious can be named, such as the exemption of women from labor (vicarious leisure); inebriacy and dissipation; costly and unæsthetic decoration; the non-punishment of crime when on a large scale; religious ceremonial evolutions recalling the terpsichorean stage or dance; the higher learning, or "classicism;" preference for inferior hand-made over superior machine-made goods; love of archaism in general; the respectability of conservatism; the conservatism and degeneracy of the higher institutions of learning; patriotism, dueling, snobbery; English saddles, walking sticks; athletic sports, college fraternities, the "cap and gown," etc., etc.

The author has certainly handled the English language with consummate skill, and, notwithstanding his indictment of "classicism," he displays no mean acquaintance with the classics. The book abounds in terse expressions, sharp antitheses, and quaint, but happy phrases. Some of these have been interpreted as irony and satire, but, as said above, this is the work of the critics themselves. The language is plain and unmistakable, as it should be, but the style is the farthest removed possible from either advocacy or vituperation, and the language, to use the author's own words, is "morally colorless." Some of it, if it is not classical, is likely to become so. His general terminology has already been used to a considerable extent in this review, the peculiar terms and expressions being put in quotation marks. Many others might be given if space permitted, such, for example, as "reputably wasteful expenditure," or "reputable waste," "reputable futility," and "pecuniary reputability;" and he speaks of certain things that have "advantages in the way of uselessness." On the other hand, we have such expressions as "vulgarly useful occupations," "vulgar effectiveness," and the "taint of usefulness." Then we have the "predatory animus," "quasi-predatory methods," "predatory fraud," "predatory parasitism," and "parasitic predation." Many incidental expressions are noteworthy, such as the "skilled and graded inebriety and perfunctory dueling" of the German students, and his statement that the "higher learning" chiefly confers a "knowledge of the unknowable." He says that the "exaltation of the defective" and admiration for "painstaking crudeness" and "elaborate ineptitude" are characteristics of "pecuniary standards of taste." And anyone who has noted how all athletic sports degenerate and become restricted to a few professionals will appreciate his remark that "the relation of football to physical culture is much the same as that of the bull fight to agriculture."

As has already been seen, the two great social classes are characterized by an assortment of sharply contrasted words and phrases, and not only their occupations, but their underlying instincts, are clearly marked off by such expressions as the "instinct of sportsmanship" and the "instinct of workmanship;" "exploit and industry," or "exploit and drudgery;" "honorific and humilific" occupations, and "perfunctory and proficuous" activities, all forming the primary contrast between "futility and utility." In each of these pairs the first belongs to the leisure class and represents the superior fitness to survive in human society. The leisure class constitutes the biologically fittest, the socially best, the aristocracy.

Of the general make-up of the book, as of all that issue from that well-known house, there is nothing to be said but praise, unless it be to note the retention of the superfluous *u* in such words as "honour," "favour," "colour," etc. To speak of our American "Labour Day" is a clear case of "archaism" and "conspicuous waste," and might be cited in defense of the main thesis of the book.

LESTER F. WARD.

WASHINGTON, D. C.

The Cost of Living as Modified by Sanitary Science. By ELLEN H. RICHARDS. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1899. Pp. 121.

THE new impulse which the world is feeling in regard to the importance of the administration of the household is trying to find expression through publications of various kinds. Unfortunately much of the printed material, be it books or magazines, is superficial, unscientific, and misleading, and its only significance to the student of social reform lies in the hope that it is the precursor of something which will have intrinsic value. Miss Salmon's work on *Domestic Service* was the first book to confirm the reasonableness of this hope; and now Mrs. Richards' book appears as another important contribution to the study of household administration.

The title is somewhat misleading, for the author gives a much larger meaning to the term "sanitary science" than is commonly accepted. This is shown in the titles of the chapters, which are: "Standards of Living;" "The Service of Sanitary Science in Increasing Productive Life;" "Household Expenditure;" "The House;" "Operating Expenses;" "Food;" "Clothing in Relation to Health;" "The Emotional and Intellectual Life;" "The Organization of the House."

Mrs. Richards' belief that "standards of living should be regulated, not by money spent, not by servile imitation of others, but by that which will produce the best results in health of body and health of mind," leads to a broader view of sanitary science than is customary, and yet to one which is perfectly sound. It is only as a better physical environment results in higher life of every kind that the effort to secure it seems worth the struggle.

The chief part of the discussion of practical details is devoted to the needs and opportunities of a family with an income of from \$1,500 to \$2,500, since this is the class in American society which has need